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LOOKING AT THE EFFECTS THIS ELECTION WILL HAVE ON LOCAL PEOPLE & POLITICS

**BYLINE:** By Jackson Diehl and Felicity Barringer, Washington Post Staff Writers

**BODY:**

Maryland's presidential vote, which so often has followed the course of traditionally Democratic industrial states, may hinge in this narrow election on distinctively local issues, often unnoticed nationally but vital to the state's business and jobs.

In a campaign in which foreign policy, the nation's economy and personal character are presumed to be the deciding factors, there are at the same time important differences between President Carter, Ronald Reagan and John B. Anderson on more parochial matters -- ranging from sea trade to smoking to the Hatch Act -- that could sway many of the state's undecided voters.

Only in Maryland, for example, would the factors that voters such as Ray Hicks are now considering be important. Hicks is one of the 130,000 federal workers in Maryland, and he will inevitably base his choice in large part on a judgment of which candidate would be a more generous employer. And while tobacco import tariffs may mean nothing in most of the industrial Northeast, they could be paramount to voters in Maryland's southern counties, where tobacco is still a foundation of daily life.

In an effort to find the differences among the three presidential candidates most important to Maryland citizens, three very different voters were contacted this week: a worker at the Bethlehem steel plant near the Port of Baltimore; a Charles County tobacco farmer; and Hicks, a blue-collar federal worker from Prince George's County.

This story will attempt to summarize the positions of Carter, Reagan and Anderson, and the difference among them, from the perspective of these three men, and in that way explain the local issues that are of the greatest importance for all Maryland voters.

Steel and the Port

Dave Hill was just out of high school when he started his job as a millwright at Bethlehem Steel, fixing the small

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and large bits of machinery that keep churning out steel plate. At the same time, the mammoth Sparrows Point plant along the Patapsco River employed about 30,000 people, a number that has shrunk to about 21,000 today.

Then, as now, Bethlehem was the state's largest employer. Then, as now, its workings were intricately bound with those of the Port of Baltimore, the huge transportation, storage and manufacturing complex sits at the heart of the Maryland economy.

A decade has passed since Dave Hill, 29, first parked his 1965 Mustang fastback in the Bethlehem lot and went to work. In that time, the arcane and distant workings of Washington -- the laws and regulations that govern air quality, workplace safety, foreign trade and unemployment benefits -- have changed the way he lives.

He has watched the industry dip with the recession of the mid 1970s and watched his fellows in Local 2610 get laid off. He has seen the recent infusion of steel imports into the United States from Europe and Japan exacerbate the problems of an industry in the grip of a new recession. And, finally, this summer, he too was laid off, becoming one of about 3,100 Bethlehem workers who have been idle for several months.

On many of these policies that affect his life, there are only minor differences in the positions of the presidential candidates. The distinctions come more in emphasis than in fact.

On the question of Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations, for instance, Reagan has said that he would "refocus on the real objectives of" OSHA laws and work with a "performance-oriented, common-sense approach." In effect, says his Maryland campaign manager, he would cut back what he sees as excessive OSHA regulation.

Carter's policy planners in the White House point to the "1,000 or so nitpicking regulations" cut back during this administration, but add that "the president supports the need for a strong and effective [Osha]." Anderson simply supports OSHA as is.

The problems of cheap steel imports have led all three of the candidates to support the so-called "Steel Price Trigger Mechanism," designed to discourage 'dumping' of low-price foreign steel on U.S. markets by requiring investigations of steel imports priced below a set figure. Carter's renewed support came this month as part of a package of proposals to revitalize the steel industry.

But in March, administration officials had suspended the trigger price mechanism in the midst of a dispute with major steel manufacturers over the administration's handling of low-priced steel imports.

Air quality laws, sometimes of critical importance to people such as Hill who live in the industry-intensive Essex-Dundalk area around the port, do divide the candidates. Reagan wants to relax for several years the deadlines on plant cleanups and "replace procedural standards with flexible performance criteria." He also would review all environmental standards and make modifications or wholly eliminate specific rules with the aid of scientific evidence.

Carter's domestic policy supporters point to the work of Environmental Protection Administrator Douglas Costle in making the regulations affecting the steel industry more flexible, allowing pollution standards to be monitored by plant instead of every smokestack, and extending some deadlines for compliance. But, they say, Carter "has supported an effective clean-air act."

Anderson, according to his campaign staff, favors "no relaxation of standards and no delay in deadlines."

Finally, the key element of aid for the Bethlehem workers laid off as competition from abroad cuts into the U.S. steel market is the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act, passed in the mid-'70s to provide increased unemployment benefits for workers in the steel, footwear and apparel industries. Dave Hill receives \$260 weekly under this act in addition to his unemployment pay.

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Anderson voted for the act while in Congress. Carter also favors it. Reagan has no position.  
Federal Workers

Ray Hicks, like most of his fellow workers at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, is confused and uncertain about his vote in the presidential election. President Carter has been perceived as a harsh, even vindictive employer by many federal workers, but Reagan and Anderson appear equally threatening. "It's a concrete threat against an abstract threat," one union official commented.

Hicks can be sure, however, of one clear difference among the candidates that could have a large effect on his future life: Carter and Anderson have supported proposals to eliminate one of the two cost-of-living increases each year in the pensions of retired federal workers, while Reagan has pledged in writing to oppose a reduction.

Hick, a 46-year-old electrician who has worked 22 years in the federal government, joined the government service originally, he said, because of its benefits and security. So the most important issues for him are those that, like the debate over reducing cost-of-living increases, affect his retirement benefits or job security.

The other important issue in this area is the current proposal by a government commission to merge the federal workers' pension system with the social security apparatus, a plan vehemently opposed by federal workers unions who see it as a threat to their retirement pay security. Reagan opposes any such merger, saying "I have declined to endorse the idea of forced social security coverage for federal employees." Anderson is "not favorably inclined" toward it, according to his staff.

Carter, meanwhile, has been perceived by federal union leaders for some time to be leaning in favor of such a merger, but wrote in a letter to American Federation of Government Employees President Kenneth Blaylock last March that he believed in a "separate, independent" federal pension system.

Some union leaders also believe that Carter in a second term would support a change in the way federal pensions are indexed to inflation, thus reducing increases. However, in a recent letter to AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland, Carter said he opposed any such alteration.

While Carter has proposed sweeping pay reform measures and instituted paid parking for federal workers, measures that were applauded nearly everywhere but in the suburban neighborhoods around Washington where Hicks and his friends live, the Republican platform says explicitly that there are "too many federal employees." Reagan has promised to abolish the departments of Energy and Education, cut back on regulatory agencies, and turn federal government activities over to the states wherever possible.

All these proposals threaten Hicks and other federal workers, although Reagan has pledged that the federal work force will be reduced through attrition, not layoffs.

Reagan also opposes changes in the Hatch Act, which limits political activity by federal workers. Carter has endorsed Hatch Act reform. According to his Maryland campaign manager, Don Devine, Reagan also is likely to look with disfavor on Carter's recent executive order mandating voluntary job-safety standards and procedures for federal workers who are exempt from the OSHA act. Anderson agrees with Carter's position. w

Finally, many federal workers believe that Reagan would follow past Republican presidents and greatly increase the amount of outside contracting by the government, thereby reducing work for blue-collar workers such as Hicks. Hicks however, points out himself that as governor of California, Reagan seemed to prefer hiring temporary government employees over outside contracting.

Tobacco Farmers

Thomas Middleton is one of the largest tobacco farmers in Charles County, where the leaf, he says, is "still the most profitable thing you can grow down here." There are about 4,000 tobacco farmers in the state, most of them in the

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southern counties, and in a normal year they store about \$40 million worth of tobacco in their barns.

For farmers such as Middleton and the surrounding economy that depends on them, the attitude of a president toward smoking -- or rather, the degree of his hostility -- can directly affect their livelihood. Carter's attitude was evident in the highly publicized antismoking campaign by former HEW secretary Joseph Califano. Anderson, judging from his public statements, likely would be just as aggressive.

Reagan, on the other hand, has taken the position that smoking is "a private matter." He probably would not launch federal campaigns against tobacco.

In keeping with his attitude about smoking, Anderson opposes government price support for tobacco, the system by which the government guarantees a farmer a price for his crop, and emphasized his position by announcing it in front of a crowd of tobacco farmers in North Carolina recently. Reagan also probably would oppose tobacco price supports, according to Devine, but Carter is in favor of them.

Although the president's position on this issue probably helps him in the Carolinas, in Maryland Middleton opposes price supports and so do most of the rest of the state's farmers. As a result, there are currently no price supports in Maryland.

Middleton must also be concerned about the embargo on grain sales to the Soviet Union imposed by President Carter last year. Like most tobacco farmers, Middleton raises grain, in this case corn, soybeans and hay, alongside his tobacco Reagan opposes the trade embargo arguing that it is not working well and is hurting farmers too much; Anderson and Carter still support it.

Finally, Middleton, who is 35 and came back to farming with his father after college, would like someday to take over the 265 acres his father owns. He is one of 14 children who will inherit equal shares of the farm however, and there are inheritance taxes to worry about. For Middleton Reagan has promised to reduce the tax burden that comes with passing family farms from one generation to the next.

Middleton, Hicks and Hill are all Democrats, but so far Carter can count on only two of their votes. Middleton will vote for Carter because "he's a farmer and I just think he understands our problems better." Although he is not affected by the "war and peace issue," Hill trusts Carter to be more effective. But Hicks says, "I don't know. It's like choosing the lesser to two evils."

**GRAPHIC:** Pictures 1 through 3, U.S. workers in District; A Bethlehem Steel plant in Maryland; farmer harvesting tobacco